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Ketos

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"*If a whale is the king of the sea, a ketos is its emperor. Though rare, they can—like emperors—bring about immense destruction with the mere movement of a single muscle*"
—Putnam Pitch, Witcher of the School of the Griffin, founder of the School of the Crane, to Jalast, Witcher Loremaster of the School of the Fox.

Ketos (Scholar's Language: *Sea Monster*) is a classification used by witchers to group together aquatic monsters whose general body plan resembles that of a whale.

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Etymology

The term ketos derives from the Scholar's Language word *ketos*, meaning *sea monster*.

The name is believed to refer to what may have been the first recorded sighting of a member of this classification, reported during the 6th century After the Resurrection in the Sea of Gales, in what is now Gemmeria.

According to Imperium sailors, the creature was described as an enormous white whale-like creature that single-handedly destroyed an entire fleet.

Characteristics

"*What a friendly whale. Look, it's coming over to greet us!*"
—Last words of an anonymous captain commanding a merchant vessel bound for Etolia.

Whale-like Appearance

Although not all ketos are actually related to whales, every member of the classification possesses a body plan that, to a greater or lesser extent, resembles that of a whale.

Size

Ketos vary considerably in size, yet all are gigantic creatures. Even the smallest known specimens measure approximately 30 metres in length, comparable to the largest blue whales.

Aquatic Lifestyle

All ketos are aquatic monsters. Most inhabit saltwater, although isolated cases have been reported in freshwater, particularly within large rias.

Hyper-Aggression

Every known ketos exhibits an exceptionally aggressive temperament. While the degree of aggression varies between species, all fall within what witchers classify

as hyper-aggressive behavior.

Even the least aggressive individuals behave much like hungry killer whales, readily attacking virtually anything they perceive as prey.

Solitary Nature

As megapredators, ketos are overwhelmingly solitary animals.

Their enormous size and intensely territorial behavior make encounters between multiple individuals extremely rare outside the breeding season.

Carnivorous Diet

Being megapredators, ketos are strictly carnivorous.

Their prey includes creatures such as dracoturtles, hippocampuses, and sea serpents. They have also been known to attack ships of every size, and on occasion even prey upon other ketos.

Magic

Unlike monsters such as fiends, which possess at least a rudimentary magical ability— hypnotizing their enemies—most ketos possess little to no innate magical ability, although notable exceptions do exist.

Instead, their terrifying power stems almost entirely from their biology, particularly their immense size and status as apex predators.

Movement

Due to their colossal bodies, ketos must remain in constant motion.

Should they remain motionless for too long, their circulatory system begins to fail, causing the blood to stagnate and become toxic throughout the body. This represents the great universal weakness shared by nearly every member of the classification, much as fire is a common vulnerability among many insectoids (frighteners being that notable exception).

Trail

Because of both their immense size and the speed at which they travel while

hunting, ketos frequently leave behind conspicuous environmental trails.

Over time, their bodies become ecosystems in their own right, carrying countless smaller organisms upon them.

The exact nature of these trails varies by species. In some cases, the water becomes visibly discolored due to the mass death of smaller marine animals or the destruction of large quantities of algae. In others, detached organisms such as bivalves fall away from the creature's body as it swims at high speed.

Experienced sailors often detect the recent passage of a ketos by casting a fishing net into the surrounding waters. If, upon retrieval moments later, the net is found densely covered in bivalves or other attached organisms, it is generally taken as a sign that a ketos passed through the area not long before.

History

Possible First Recorded Sighting (6th Century A.R.)

During the 6th century After the Resurrection, a fishing fleet belonging to the Imperium (not to be confused with the much later Nilfgaardian Empire) is said to have encountered what is believed to have been an enormous white whale-like creature in the southern Sea of Gales which due to it´s size and behaviour they named *ketos*, meaning *sea monster*.

According to the surviving accounts, the creature single-handedly destroyed the entire fleet.

Only a handful of sailors survived to recount what had happened. Their story spread from generation to generation, enduring even after the arrival of the Nordlings.

However, precisely because it survived only through oral tradition, and because the creature was never seen again for reasons unknown, the event gradually came to be regarded as legend rather than reliable historical evidence of the first member of the ketos classification.

Later Centuries

Over the following centuries, additional accounts of monstrous whales began to emerge throughout the world.

These stories became particularly common along the western coast of the Old Continent, especially among the islanders, most notably the Skelligers. Owing to their deep dependence on the sea, Skelligers were among the peoples who most frequently claimed to have encountered such creatures.

Many of the enormous sea monsters described in these traditions would, in time, be recognized as genuine ketos, with several species eventually receiving the very names first given to them in Skelliger folklore.

Discovery of the Classification

During the 1290s, Putnam Pitch, then a witcher of the School of the Griffin, established the ketos classification following an encounter while escorting a merchant vessel belonging to Opiekenbeg and Sons along the trade route between Kerack and Cidaris.

During the voyage, the ship came under attack by a nauthveli, a colossal marine monster that came close to destroying the vessel.

After the creature was slain, Putnam Pitch performed a detailed autopsy. Noticing striking similarities between its anatomy and the legendary monstrous white whale-like creature reportedly sighted centuries earlier in the Sea of Gales, he concluded that the creature represented not an isolated species but part of a broader group of giant whale-like marine monsters.

From this realization, the ketos classification was born.

The name nauthveli, meanwhile, was coined by the Skelliger sailor Gremmdetr Tuldilisdottir, who had been aboard the vessel during the encounter. After Putnam determined that the creature was more closely related to bovines than to whales, Gremmdetr recalled an enormous sea beast described in old Skelliger tales and proposed the name, which was subsequently adopted by witchers.

Notable Ketos

- Aspidochelone: A ketos distinguished by its enormous shell, resembling that of the dracoturtles.
- Bahamut: Relationship to other known animal groups unknown.
- Brunfiskur: Believed to be related to the pilot whale.
- Dettir: Believed to be related to the narwhal.

- Hafgufa: Believed to be related to the blue whale.
- Katthveli: Believed to be related to the great felines.
- Kembir: Relationship to other known animal groups unknown.
- Ketos: The legendary creature from which the entire classification derives its name. Its existence remains unconfirmed.
- Lavelane: Believed to be related to rodents.
- Lyngbakur: Believed to be related to the killer whale.
- Makara: Believed to be related to the elephant.
- Nauthveli: The first ketos to be scientifically described, serving as the foundation for the classification.
- Pollur: Believed to be related to the pygmy whale.
- Pristis: Believed to be related to the humpback whale.
- Repun: Relationship to other known animal groups unknown.
- Taumur: Believed to be related to the sperm whale.

Not to Be Confused With

- Bake-kujira: A monster native to the Tuyotuki Islands of the Far East. A type of specter said to arise from the cruel mistreatment and slaughter of whales.
- Delphitrum: A classification of monsters whose general appearance resembles that of dolphins.
- Gveleshapi: A serpentine aquatic monster found primarily in large lakes. It is occasionally mistaken for a whale due to the shape of its tail.
- Phokoid: A classification of monsters whose appearance resembles that of seals, excluding selkies, which, despite their seal-like form, are classified as antherions, and semalodirs, which belong to the cursed ones.

Trivia

- The ketos classification was inspired by the many mythological creatures based on whales found throughout different cultures. Its name derives from the Greek kêtos[W] (cetus), the legendary sea monster of Greek mythology.
- Lavelane is a reference to the Lavellan[W] of Scottish mythology.
- Most of the other ketos are likewise inspired by creatures from Icelandic mythology, although monsters originating from other mythological traditions are also represented within the classification.

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